

The Illusion of Security

“You have spent more than half your lives with this country at war,” journalist Martha Raddatz told graduating Kenyon College students this spring. Anyone younger than 13 has never lived in the United States during peacetime. The new normal for whole generations is a seemingly endless war.

We are all harmed by this state of perpetual war: when our government spends money on the Pentagon at the expense of health, environmental protection and other priorities; and when the strategies intended to bring security provide only its illusion.

The U.S. military is the face of our country’s foreign policy in many parts of the world. It is visible in the nearly 800 military bases that the U.S. operates outside its borders and in the drone and armed attacks it carries out in Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere.

It’s not just that a militarized approach to preventing extremism isn’t working. It’s that it *can’t* work.

But this militarized approach to problem-solving is evident even when U.S. troops are not deployed. Since 9/11, the U.S. has dramatically expanded its so-called security assistance programs, which provide training, support and weapons to armies and police forces around the world. Our country now provides military and police aid to more than 130 nations in an effort to combat violent extremism.

This approach is not working. In 2013, “terrorist” attacks increased by 43 percent around the world over the previous year, according to the U.S. State Department. This continues a trend of steady growth in violent extremism over the last decade. While no new attacks on the scale of 9/11 have occurred within U.S. borders, the seeds of violence are growing.

Through this militarized aid, the U.S. often allies itself with repressive governments and human rights abusers. U.S. security assistance has gone to support military officers who went on to stage coups and to police that work to undermine, rather than support, peace and security. Although some of this assistance goes to non-military programs that help communities heal and grow, all too often the U.S. is training the very forces that are fueling violent extremism.

But the problem is deeper. It’s not just that a military-based approach to preventing extremism isn’t working. It’s that it *can’t* work. The fundamental problem of U.S. security assistance — as with other military tactics for carrying out foreign policy — is that violence is not a solution to violence.

This is as much of a practical position as it is a moral one. Violence does not address the reasons why people turn to violence in the first place, reasons such as economic injustice, scarcity of resources, political disenfranchisement, corruption and unemployment. Responding to violence with force may feel effective, but it does not create the conditions under which peace —and true security — can flourish.

U.S. decision-makers are aware that militarized assistance policies have shortcomings, even if they haven’t fully embraced the alternatives. Last year, as the Obama administration considered U.S. airstrikes against ISIS, one congressional staffer told an FCNL lobbyist that he knew air strikes wouldn’t solve the problem. But he didn’t know what else to propose.

We have some suggestions. In these pages, we share progress on important first steps to rein in the worst aspects of U.S. security assistance, increase its transparency and shift its emphasis from military aid to peacebuilding. In our next issue, we’ll explore more deeply the ways that the U.S. government can proactively support peacebuilding around the world.

The U.S. can do more than conjure an illusion of security. It can help provide the real thing. 

The Failures of Security Assistance

Last June, Mexican security forces allegedly executed 15 suspected gang members in Tlatlaya, then tortured and sexually assaulted two witnesses. A few months later, Mexican police attacked 43 students in Iguala and turned them over to a gang called Guerreros Unidos, who allegedly murdered them.

The security forces and police that carried out these abuses were, in part, funded by U.S. taxpayers. Ultimately, the U.S. was forced to cut off funding for the military units involved.

Since 2007, the U.S. has provided Mexico with \$2 billion in security assistance. Some has gone to justice and police reform efforts, with positive results. But some has effectively allied our country with security units that routinely commit human rights abuses.

What Is Security Assistance?

This story is all too familiar: the U.S. provides money, called security assistance, to help supply and train foreign police and military units. According to

FCNL's partners at the Security Assistance Monitor, the U.S. has given out about \$90 billion in security assistance in the last 5 years to recipients in more than 130 countries.

Some security assistance programs do help communities. But the majority of this money funds the militarized approach to problem-solving that has long been a more comfortable tool for the U.S. than other types of foreign aid. Particularly to people wary of

long-term international entanglements, money for guns and training is a politically palatable way of exerting U.S. influence.

The aid is given with little or no consideration of local political dynamics and no public evaluation of the impact of the assistance. While the U.S. legally cannot fund security force units with a record of human rights abuses, enforcement is uneven. And the use of this assistance has expanded in the last 14 years.

Security Assistance and the "War on Terror"

In response to 9/11 and now to the threat of violent extremist groups — from Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabab in Somalia to ISIS in Iraq and Syria and al-Qaida in Yemen — the U.S. has increased not only security assistance but other forms of military aid. The stated objective for this aid is to promote democracy and stability and, ultimately, make the world safer from violent extremism.

By and large, security assistance has not had that effect. Instead, the aid often allies the U.S. with groups or even governments at odds with their own people.

Militarized U.S. security assistance can make violent extremism worse, as the world is seeing in

Iraq and Somalia. Furthermore, the groups receiving U.S. training can exacerbate divided politics. In Mali, a U.S.-trained general led a 2012 coup that ended two decades of democratic rule. Violence still continues in parts of the country. In South Sudan, the U.S. provided millions of dollars in security assistance and training for the country's armed forces. But South Sudan's new army split into opposing factions that are engaged in a bitter civil war.

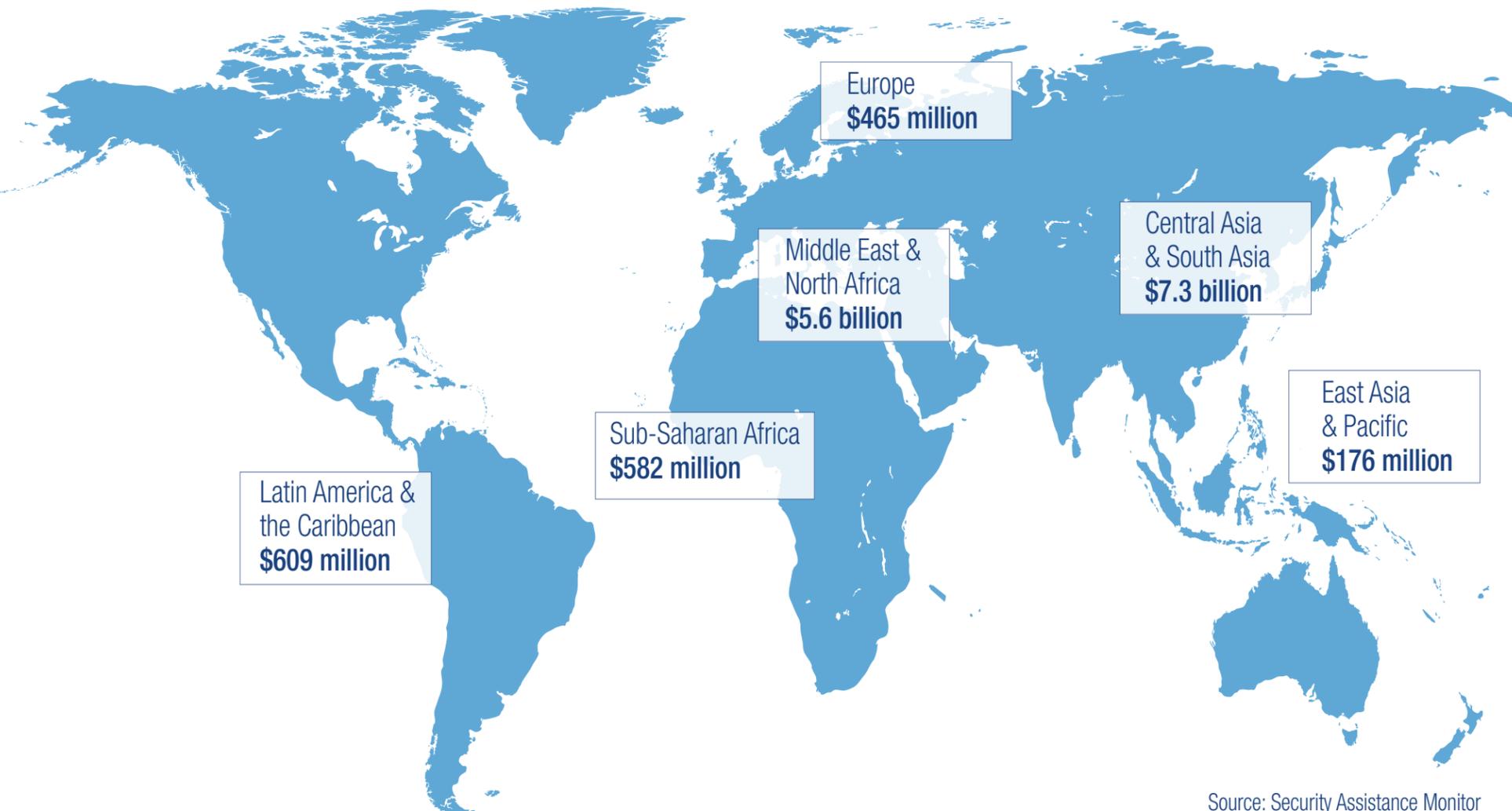
Security assistance can even take away with one hand what the U.S. is supporting with the other. As our lobbyist Theo Sither observes (see pg. 8), in Kenya the U.S. is supporting job training for Muslim youth. Our country is also funding and training the Kenyan counterterrorism police that contribute to tensions with the Muslim community. A 2014 Human Rights Watch report implicated these units for carrying out extrajudicial killings; nonetheless, the U.S. is looking to expand security assistance to Kenya.

A Way Forward

U.S. security assistance, as it is currently conceived, does not work and is doing more harm than good. But often when confronted with the terrible reality of violent extremism, the desire of our political leaders to do

(continued on page 7)

U.S. Military & Police Aid 2014



Source: Security Assistance Monitor
securityassistance.org

WHAT COUNTRIES RECEIVED THE MOST U.S. MILITARY AND POLICE AID IN 2014?

1. Afghanistan
2. Israel
3. Pakistan
4. Egypt

Peace through Shared Security

We believe the counterterrorism aid that the U.S. provides does more harm than good. But the underlying goal, to make the U.S. and the world more secure, is worth pursuing. What alternatives can we offer to advance this goal?

We have to address the mistaken idea that peace can come out of violence. U.S. counterterrorism policy, as it's currently carried out, is grounded in violence and a seemingly endless war against an ideology. The last 13 years have shown the unintended consequences of this approach.

If we desire a society of peace, then we cannot achieve such a society through violence.

~ Bayard Rustin, Quaker and Civil Rights Organizer

Airstrike campaigns, drone attacks and military aid have failed to create sustainable security. Occasionally they produce short-term "successes" like the killing of a radical leader or the recapture of a town. But we've seen that new leaders and groups emerge after the dust settles and attention fades, sometimes stronger than before, such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

What are ways forward? We are working towards a new role for the U.S. in the world, based on the pursuit of our shared security as a national and global community. We seek policy that is grounded in a deeper understanding of the challenges facing our highly interdependent world. We support a cooperative search for solutions that reduce violent conflict and meet social needs.

From the grounding of this vision for security reimagined, in pursuit of a world free of war and the

threat of war, we advocate for specific policies that bring that vision closer to reality.

A first step is changing the approach of our security assistance programs. As of now, this aid is too focused on training and equipping foreign police and armies to fight those who perpetrate violence.

In many of the countries to which we give security assistance, military support and weapons are the primary component of our relationship. Little to no help is given to resolve the underlying grievances that encourage violent extremism.

Ultimately, we would like to see this aid moved into programs that build peace. As a first step, Congress should shift the balance of funding from an almost exclusive reliance on militarized security assistance, training and weapons towards addressing the root causes of violent extremism. Congress should also increase oversight of and accountability for U.S. security assistance. (See pg. 7 for more recommendations.)

Research shows that poverty, poor governance and corruption are three major causes of violent extremism. The U.S. could help address these issues by integrating human rights training and other peacebuilding components into programs that provide militarized aid.

Even with security assistance reforms, however, an effective and ethical U.S. foreign policy should begin with well-equipped and adequately funded civilian institutions that are focused on peacebuilding. The State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are best suited to lead these efforts, and Congress should fund them in proportion to their work's importance.



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Look for a new video every Thursday about Quaker thought and life. Don't miss seeing FCNL's work and community in action!

QUAKERSPEAK.COM

The reality is that civilian agencies in the U.S. government are helping to create shared security, right now, around the world.

Bringing people together to create healthy, resilient communities is the best way to prevent violent extremism.

Our partners on the ground in areas of conflict are using funding we lobby for to carry out this work. Economic development programs in sub-Saharan Africa, national dialogue projects in Libya, women empowerment programs in Bangladesh and many more efforts are engaging populations most affected by poverty, poor governance and marginalization, transforming them into peacemakers rather than targets for extremist groups.

These projects do not make headlines. They are not flashy or loud.

But they work. Bringing people together to create healthy, resilient communities is the best way to prevent violent extremism.

We are working for more than a policy change. We are working to bring about the world that we seek — a world free of war and the threat of war.

A realignment — from overwhelming militarism to sustainable peacebuilding — is not necessarily about ideology. It's also about effectiveness. If the U.S. is interested in preventing violent extremism, it will abandon its militarized approach. Its track record of failure is clear.

Peacebuilding's future is bright. Projects in Guinea, Indonesia and elsewhere that prevent violence rather than crush it with force are working. Military and civilian policymakers alike are beginning to recognize the declining utility of war and the use of force as effective instruments for resolving violent conflict and preventing violent extremism. We regularly speak with former members of the military who support an alternative approach. President Obama himself has acknowledged the limitations of a military-focused strategy, even if his administration has not always acted on that belief.

We are still working to realize our vision. But we are making progress. By address our common, human needs for food, water, basic protection and responsive leaders, the U.S. can promote cooperative, shared security in places prone to extremism. And that makes us all safer. 

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Assistant Clerk: Eric Ginsburg
Executive Secretary: Diane Randall

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Authors: Sean Langberg, Alicia McBride, Theo Sither
Photos: FCNL staff, Jim Morris
Design/Layout: Emily Sajewski

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Friends Committee on National Legislation
245 Second Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002-5761
Phone: 202-547-6000
800-630-1330
Fax: 202-547-6019
fcnl.org
fcnlinfo@fcnl.org

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March 2015:
Villagers walk up a
mountain in Burundi.



Kenya from page 8

Secretary of State John Kerry said in May that U.S. security assistance to Kenya could top \$100 million this year. In contrast, President Obama is asking for only \$30 million for the entire Complex Crises Fund to support violence prevention projects and groups around the world.

The U.S. is spending too much money on militarized assistance and not nearly enough on peacebuilding. Two recent attacks have shaken Kenya's sense of security — one at Westgate mall in 2013 and another at Garissa University this year. To the Kenyans I spoke with, these massacres are warning signs that the larger problems Kenyans face have not been adequately addressed — problems that U.S. security assistance cannot solve. Yet the U.S. responded to the mall attack by stepping up assistance to Kenya's anti-terrorism police.

Local communities need to be protected from groups like al-Shabab, who claimed responsibility for those attacks. But the Kenyan police unit that received increased U.S. aid has a history of abuse and violence, as the U.S. State Department and Human Rights Watch have documented. I was told that some people, especially Muslims, will not go to the police with information because they fear the police more than they fear al-Shabab.

Systemic corruption exacerbates local grievances, leading some people to trust armed groups rather than the government. This, in turn, increases recruitment for those groups. More U.S. military and police aid will not help.

In some cases, the U.S. has played a positive role. In 2007, election-related violence left more than 1,000

people dead and spurred efforts to prevent a recurrence. In advance of the 2013 national elections, FCNL encouraged U.S. support for Kenyan peacebuilders who were monitoring potential flash points in their communities. Both the Obama administration and Congress spoke supportively about violence prevention efforts. This focus contributed to relatively peaceful elections.

Kenyan national elections will take place again in 2017. Kenyan Quakers tell us that what happens before these elections will have a big impact on whether and how much violence occurs during the elections. President Obama's visit to Kenya in July provides an opportunity for the U.S. to shift its course to support peacebuilding more than problematic police and military forces. U.S. policy needs to sustain its support for Kenyan efforts to build peace.

In Kenya, I met with people who are reactivating systems used during the last elections and coordinating to be able to respond to problems. They strongly believe that building sustained peace and security is a long-term process. Their everyday experiences reinforce a conviction that deadly military action and abusive police crackdowns are part of the problem.

The U.S. should support these efforts by increasing support for community-based programs to address trauma, root out corruption, support democratic governance and provide sustainable development assistance. This, not militarized security, should be the U.S. focus.

The peacebuilders I met in Kenya are showing us what success looks like. We should pay attention. 

Security Assistance from page 4

"something" means that security assistance is the tool they reach for.

There are better ways to build peace. FCNL's advocacy focuses on orienting U.S. policy towards our shared security.

Congress and the administration need to change their approaches to security assistance. Here are three ways they can start:

1. Increase accountability and oversight. Information about U.S. assistance to individual countries, security forces and militias should be publicly available. The U.S. should be required to explain the goals and the strategic framework of this assistance and regularly evaluate its impact.

2. Restrict U.S. alliances with human rights abusers. Congress should have strong, well-enforced restrictions on assistance to police and military units implicated in or suspected of human rights abuses. The U.S. should proactively support human rights defenders and efforts to hold security forces accountable for abuse.

3. Emphasize shared security. U.S. support, training and supplies should focus on reforming security forces and their institutions and on supporting local peacebuilding groups. The balance of assistance should shift from military aid and training to supporting conflict resolution, job creation, addressing economic injustice and promoting democratic and open societies. 

BURUNDI PEACE: A UNITED QUAKER VOICE

Nine Quaker organizations issued a joint letter on the need for peace and reconciliation in Burundi.

Read the letter: fcnl.org/burundiletter

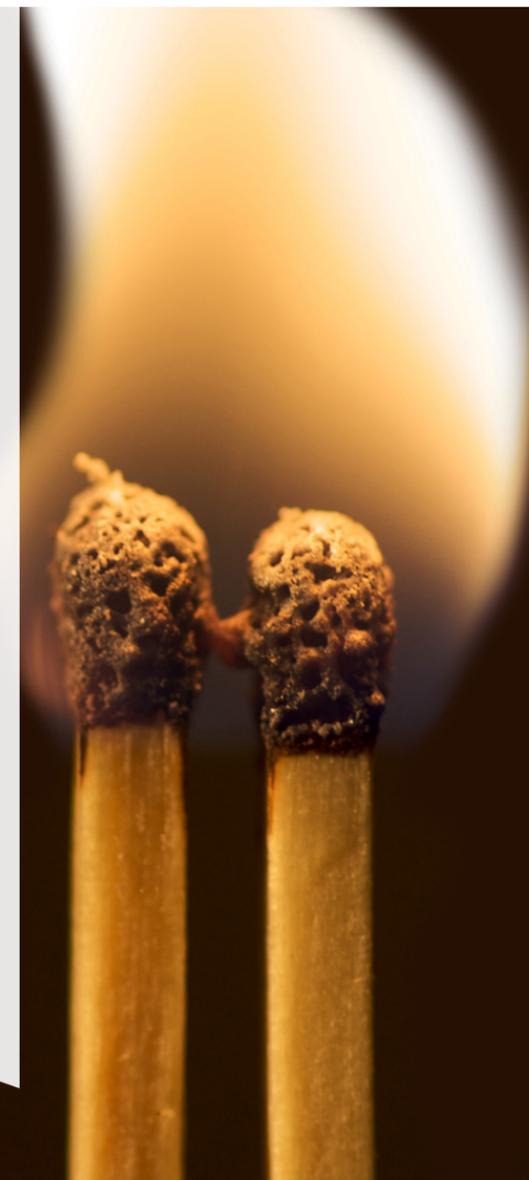
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Inside:

- The failure of U.S. security assistance
- Peace through shared security

Washington Newsletter No. 770, June 2015

Kenya: Lessons for U.S. Policy

By Theo Sittler

What are the consequences of a militarized counterterrorism policy? How can the U.S. help build peace? Kenya provides examples both of a failed military-first approach and the alternatives.

In March, I traveled to Kenya to meet with Quaker peacebuilders and other colleagues. FCNL has been working with Friends in Kenya for the last five years as we advocate for U.S. policies that support peacebuilding and rely less on military force. I also met with U.S.-funded organizations that provide economic and educational opportunities for young leaders in the border region between Somalia and Kenya.

I heard that Kenyans appreciate U.S. assistance that supports local peacebuilders and provides training and jobs for their communities. But the U.S. has also provided more than \$230 million in militarized security assistance to Kenya during the last decade, about \$123 million of which has gone to counterterrorism and border security efforts. U.S. funds, for example, helped train Kenyan police units later accused of brutal violence against civilians. My sense is that this

assistance, however well meaning, often ends up exacerbating tensions and does more harm than good.

What's more, U.S. security assistance to Kenya could soon increase. Much of the nearly \$700 million in counterterrorism assistance that President Obama has requested for East Africa would go to Kenya.

(continued on page 6)



Theo Sittler is FCNL's lead peacebuilding lobbyist. Theo builds frameworks for peace within U.S. government structures by lobbying for non-violent measures to prevent and resolve violent conflict.